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*SOME ASPECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY  
OF RUDOLPH EUCKEN*

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The debt of religion to philosophy is thus far a somewhat questionable obligation. The influence of philosophy upon religion has been, of course, profound; but this influence has been by no means always helpful or beneficent. Indeed there is some reason to say that, take the world together, philosophy has quite as often hindered the development of the religious consciousness as it has set forward the course of religious progress.

From time to time the great and wondrous truths of experience, out of which religion has its spring, have been rediscovered by adventurous souls, always to the great joy of a goodly portion of mankind. Never has such rediscovery failed to produce a deep impression on the living generation of men. Even the mere rumor of it will bring to pass something like the results which follow when a new gold-field is located. The same kind of "stampede" is apt to take place to secure a portion of this new spiritual treasure. But no sooner does a vigorous religious movement come into being than men begin to philosophize about it. They must needs elaborate and systematize the truths to which it has witnessed; they feel it incumbent upon them to explain its origin and to map out its path to future greatness. This is inevitable, since man is an intellectual being, and knows in his heart that if he can arrive at an adequate understanding of the facts of experience, he can use this knowledge to enlarge the sources of his well-being. But in many instances it has been none the less lamentable; for the spring of spiritual life, upon which humanity again and again stumbles in its desert wanderings, is quite as frequently trampled out of sight in the battle of creeds that sets in above it. So many and so different are the speculations concerning it which

speedily arise, and so zealous does each school of thought become in the advocacy of its peculiar views, that presently there is no longer any water of life to quench men's thirst, but only certain theories as to the nature and properties of that water believed to have been once found.

Something even worse than this may come to pass; for, entertaining only a benevolent design to preserve and purify the spring, philosophy may yet poison it, so that it becomes a source of infection rather than of refreshment and strength. Religion has always been, by turns, the world's greatest blessing and its heaviest curse. Vice generally half recognizes, at least, its own deformity, and is seldom so threatening to man's higher life as is that contaminated stream of religious tradition and belief of which men partake under the delusion that it is supremely medicinal to their souls.

This poison which gets to be so thoroughly mingled with religious ideas and customs, comes mainly from a false philosophy. Human reason, on the whole, is still unable to cope adequately with the big problems of existence, though by narrowing its field of observation to a few of the most convenient and manageable facts it easily convinces itself that it has solved them all; and its overconfident answers to the riddles that confront us have often been fraught with very unhappy consequences to the religious life, which it has thus led seriously astray.

Nevertheless one is permitted to hope and believe that it remains for philosophy to render to religion, in the end, an inestimable service: to show men a path wherein they can walk with certain steps toward spiritual riches which hitherto they have found, too often, only by instinct or by accident. The spiritual nature of mankind holds, it may be, what are as yet undreamed-of possibilities. Certainly wonderful experiences are recorded, on testimony which it is difficult to impeach. But not often do those who have reached the high places of the spirit know very clearly by what road they arrived; and hence they are not able to point out a plain path for others to follow.

But if, at last, by means of insight and study and reflection, reason can show us the road to what a few of the greatest souls have found, and show it so convincingly that "wayfaring men,

though fools, shall not err therein," the world's religion will thereby inherit an immeasurable benefit.

It is the purpose of this paper to point out the indications of some clear gain which recent philosophy has made in this direction. That Professor Eucken has given us a final and complete exposition of the religious life it would be far too much to claim. But his is one of the broadest and sanest interpretations of existence, from the religious point of view, as yet afforded us; and we will try at a few points to set forth its promise of helpfulness to the religious life.

The standpoint which we shall occupy in this endeavor is that of the religious mind, looking out to see what probable gain and assistance is being brought to it by a friendly power. We will not assume to take the philosophic point of view; but, holding our outlook and position as religious men, it is surely legitimate for us to form some estimate of forces which appear to be marching to our relief.

The first superior feature of Eucken's philosophy to which I desire to call attention, is the balance of emphasis maintained in his thought between the three supreme realities with which religion has to deal, that is to say, God and nature and the human soul. Plant-life is nourished mainly on three elements; and though the formula by which these elements are supplied needs to be varied for different kinds of vegetation, there must be enough of all three, or plant-life languishes. The most conspicuous failure of the farmer is his neglect to furnish his growing crops with one at least of these three requisites.

So the religious life, wherever it finds natural and strong expression, always lays something like equal emphasis on three great and separate types of being: God and nature and man; and wherever religious life fails either to maintain itself or to produce good fruit, it is perhaps chiefly because one of these has been too much neglected.

That this is true ought to be fairly evident in the very statement of what religion always has been. It might be defined as man's endeavor to secure help from spiritual sources in his contest with a somewhat unfriendly world. At least that is what religion is wherever it amounts to anything as a power in human

affairs. It recognizes in nature a power so far unfriendly as to be sometimes a source of temptation and oppression. It recognizes God as at least a possible ally of the soul in its struggle for freedom and security. It recognizes the human soul as a reality great enough to be the recipient of divine favor, and as a thing separable and distinct from the background of nature against which it matches its strength.

It must be plain, then, that if any one of these three terms drops much out of notice, religion has no longer any excuse for being. Without nature, there is no sufficient reason for seeking God's help. Without God, there is no source whence help can come. Without the soul as something apart from nature, there is nothing to be helped.

There are, of course, conspicuous instances which illustrate the spiritual poverty that results when religious life shuts its eyes to one of these supreme realities. Thus Buddhism was in its origin practically an atheistic faith. Its founder taught men to expect no help whatever from the gods, but to rely solely on the power of self-denial residing in their own wills. Human nature, it is true, revenged itself upon this Eastern prince, and upon his system, by making him its deity. But it remains a faith without any real doctrine of God; and never has it built up, in the minds of the men over whom it has held sway, any robust spiritual life.

The great failure of Christianity through the larger portion of its history has come from its lack of a decent doctrine of man. Those human souls which were initiated, by the magic rites of the Church, into a fellowship of saints, have been regarded as of some consequence in the scheme of things; but for man, as man, most Christians have manifested, and do still manifest, the utmost contempt. The ruling schools of Christian philosophy, for many centuries, used the whole of existence to make it redound to the glory of God, at the expense of humanity. It became a kind of sin to think of the creature as possessing or deserving any glory whatever in the presence of his creator. The thought of man was reduced almost to its meanest and its lowest terms. The very ardor of religious passion was no doubt responsible, in large measure, for this result; for the soul which has caught a vision of Deity often displays something of that tendency to immolate

itself which draws the moth toward the flame. But for purposes of life it should be evident enough that religion can be no great help to the world without deep love and respect for what is in man.

In our own day we have seen a religious movement manifesting astonishing powers of growth,—springing up indeed with suspicious rapidity like a fungus over night,—while studiously ignoring the third of these fundamental terms. To the Christian Scientist nature is a negligible quantity. The whole of the material world is treated as a realm of shadows. This is the latest of a long line of experiments to found the spiritual life on a denial of the reality of that outward world which appears to be the soul's antagonist. Its significance for us lies mainly in the fact that it is of our day, and illustrates the constant tendency of religious thought, down to this present time, to ease its task by throwing aside one of the three elements which it is asked to weave together.

The real problem of religious philosophy is to make a system of thought in which God and man and nature stand together: none of these being merged and lost in another's larger presence. Endless examples might be given of attempts to solve this problem by evasion, and of the weakness in religion that inevitably results. Thus the great weakness of modern liberalism has been a disposition to exalt nature at the expense of man; to slight and belittle the deep facts of human consciousness in comparison with the laws that regulate the world of physical things. By yielding to this tendency the intellect can be placated, through the partial elimination of some of those mysteries in whose presence it stands baffled and uneasy; but it means the sure impoverishment of spiritual life.

Now in the thought of Eucken there appears to be intelligent appreciation of the necessity for keeping all these supreme realities before the mind's attention, and a sustained endeavor to frame a system of ideas in which no one of them shall suffer eclipse. That means much for religion, if the world should listen to and be impressed by what he has to say; because such a philosophy accords with the real genius of religion, and affords a reasonable basis for full and complete manifestation of the religious life.

More specifically, in its relation to other recent systems of

thought, Eucken's philosophy stands for a return to personality as a fact of cosmic significance. Traditional Christian theology has never rightly considered what it means that man is a person. The scientific mind of our time has largely taken it for granted that personality is an illusion; that what each one calls himself is no real entity, but a mere succession of states of consciousness. Spiritual and religious movements like New England Transcendentalism, being more or less under the influence of this great new wave of scientific interest, have rather tended to abandon the thought of personality. "The soul," said Mr. Emerson, "knows no persons." Even Dr. Hedge had doubts whether human personality were anything great enough, or important enough, to survive the shock of death. In Professor Eucken we have one able to do full justice to all that modern science has to say; one, moreover, who fully understands and appreciates the whole history of philosophic thought; and who puts man, as a person, in that place of something like equality with God and nature, to which unreflective religion instinctively assigns him.

Eucken seems to have examined with minute and patient care the rival schemes of "naturalism" and "intellectualism," to use his terms; the former of which will only allow that man's inward world is the evanescent shadow of the real outward world; while the other school is positive that man knows external nature only as a reflection of his own inner world of thought. Both of these philosophic schemes he finds defective: though for naturalism, especially, he entertains deep respect, as for a foeman worthy of his steel. His own attempt appears to be to utilize what is best in the thought of both naturalist and idealist to form a new personalistic philosophy that will answer better as an interpretation of the whole of existence. He thus supplies to the current thought of the age that missing third term which is needed to put it once more in touch with the main line of religious development. Plenty of thought in this our day concerns itself with God and with nature, as with realities of the highest rank. Not so much of it dares assume that man's existence as a spiritual being is of the same high order.

It is quite beyond the scope of our present purpose to enter into the question of personality, as between Eucken and the

reigning naturalistic school. What I am here endeavoring to point out is that when any of these fundamental facts of the religious life are overlooked, religion must suffer swift decline: that in effect the thought of man has fallen to a much lower place than that occupied by the thought of God and the thought of nature; and that Eucken's philosophy affords at least some promise of its restoration, to the consequent strengthening of those motives which underlie religious effort.

The second feature of this great German's thought which seems to me worthy of comment, as seen from the point of view we have chosen to take, is his conception of the relationship that exists between God and man and nature. As a matter of course the divine power is conceived of as being friendly, and only friendly, to human life. God as he exists for his children upon earth is, above all else, redeeming love. The old Hebraic idea of an avenging Deity, who averts his face from those with whom he is offended, means nothing to this philosopher. His views of the moral character of God are as enlightened as any one could ask.

What relation exists between God and nature, save that he is the maker and builder of nature's forms, it is perhaps no special business of ours to try to discover; but it is highly important that we should understand what relation exists between ourselves and nature. And this, in all that pertains to our higher life, Eucken conceives to be largely antagonistic.

With regard to this point I should like to say again that such a conviction seems to me vital to what has heretofore been known among men by the name of religion. That has always been concerned, mainly, with the means for procuring spiritual help amid the trials and hardships that men must bear. If there are no such trials and hardships, if the seeming opposition of nature to man's desires is merely a disguised friendliness, then this quest for divine help is practically useless. Conceivably, of course, there may be something much better than religion, as that word is commonly understood. There may be an attitude of trust, of acquiescence, and of worship, which is distinctly higher than that attitude of petition which religion for the most part adopts. Regarding that, one only need say here that the culti-



vation of such a passive attitude hardly seems likely to demand, or to sustain, much of that kind of effort which has established the world's great religious institutions. People who only want to believe that things are perfectly right, as they are, will not require much of a church to support that faith. The conviction of the religious mind has always been that, in some respects, things were alarmingly wrong, and that it remained for humanity, with God's help, to try to make them right. The difficulty of this task has always disposed men who have seriously measured themselves against it to seek the assistance of higher powers. To me it seems quite improbable that organized religion can have any future under a radically different interpretation of existence. For that reason I hold Eucken's conviction of this unfriendliness of nature to be vital to the perpetuation of such religious institutions as we have received from the past.

And now, is nature our enemy or our friend? Are we what we are because nature has wrought upon us and for us, or because we have wrought for ourselves in despite of nature, and have forced her to yield, grudgingly, to our designs? One may say that nature is our best friend, being our enemy. That however is a subsequent reflection which ought to have no influence upon our decision of the main question. Are we to yield to nature as to a kindly Providence that is working out our destiny, or are we to resist nature as a power that knows nothing of what we call the highest good? Shall we suffer the winds and the currents of natural influence to carry us whither they will, or shall we so hold our rudder and trim our sail as to go in quite a different, even in the very opposite direction?

For my part, I see not how any man who ever kept a garden can rest under the illusion that nature is altogether his friend. She will grow his cabbages and his strawberries, it is true, if a sufficiently masterful hand is exerted to extort from her this boon. But she never suffers the man to forget that she would infinitely prefer to grow something else; and that, generally, something in which he takes no kind of interest. She has a special bug, characterized by phenomenal voracity and fecundity for every species of vegetation in which he takes delight, or if for the

moment she happens to be inadequately armed, she can and does invent the appropriate pest. She will bend all her energies to the production of what are for human purposes useless weeds, and she will choke every seed that the gardener plants, if she can. Nobody can have a garden, probably nobody ever did have a garden, without maintaining a ceaseless fight. I take this to be, in a general way, typical of our relations with the visible world surrounding us.

To be sure, Emerson wrote of the Pyramids and the abbey-churches of England that

“Nature gladly gave them place,  
Adopted them into her race,  
And granted them an equal date  
With Andes and with Ararat.”

But he was perfectly aware of another side of nature, and could portray that side upon occasion in terms with which this poetry does not very well agree. It is much to be doubted whether nature ever really “adopts” any work of human hands. Wherever man has toiled to make visible his thought in wood or stone, nature following after him has done her best to obliterate his monuments. It takes her a long time to effect this in some instances, but she never surrenders the task.

It may be said that to represent the outward world as being actively hostile to human interests is as false as to suppose that all its doings bear conscious reference to the service of the human race; and this is of course true. The truth appears to be that for the most part nature is indifferent to man. In her operations she mostly overlooks us, betrays entire ignorance of our presence. How should it be otherwise, nature being, after all, only a vast machine, and incapable of recognizing us either in friendliness or hostility?

Man has an ideal of his own, which he certainly never learned from the world about him. Wherever it came from,—from a higher divine source or out of his own imagination,—it is something which nature knows not of. Her life runs in one channel, ours in another groove and she cares nothing either to further or to oppose what is dearest to our hearts.

But this very indifference makes her in multifold ways our antagonist. Her vast inertia is the dead weight that we have again and again to lift. Her blind insistence upon a way that is not ours creates a current from which it is often a work of huge labor to extricate ourselves. Niagara is doubtless innocent of all intent to hurl into the abyss a swimmer who has been caught in its stream. But, none the less, that swimmer must fight Niagara with all his strength, and must soon reach some rock to which he can cling, or his doom is sealed.

It seems to me the most idle of all play-acting to pretend that this necessity to struggle against the tendencies and influences of nature is merely an illusion. All great naturalists understand perfectly that nature is a non-moral realm; and surely never was attempt more vain—one might almost say more idiotic—than the endeavor to convert naturalism into a religion. In order to worship the God of nature, you have to shut your eyes to a host of things that are utterly repugnant to the spiritual sense.

Have we, at last, freed ourselves from necessity to believe in whatever beastliness the Old Testament contains, as if that were a true rendering of the law of God for men, only to take as our Bible what is sometimes called the "book of life," that manifestation of the outward world still more replete with instances and incidents wholly shocking to our spiritual sensibilities? Whatever it may mean, and however we may interpret the fact, between our spirits and many of the ways of nature there is, as Huxley said, "everlasting war." It is of course open to us to say that this is a state of things which God has himself designed because our souls have need of just this antagonist. But the faith which girds itself for such a conflict is widely different from the mere passivism, or quietism, which expects the whole process of deliverance to be wrought out by means of natural law. Eucken calls us back from that essentially pagan notion, into which the world has partially lapsed, to the stern but heroic idea of battle, which has hitherto inspired great Christian souls.

In the third place his thought is noteworthy from a religious point of view, because he points out the chasm that opens between man and nature, or perhaps a still deeper gulf, running also through man's own being, and dividing two sides of human nature from

each other. Paul's thought of the natural and the spiritual man is based upon no broader or more vital distinction than that which, according to Eucken's view, divides the higher from the lower types of human life. This is of religious importance, because as the division between man and nature has hitherto furnished the ground of appeal to a source of heavenly help, so now, without beholding some such deep cleft running through human nature itself, we are quite likely to be left without any good foundation on which to rest a heavenly hope. That is to say, what Eucken calls "mere man," or the "petty human," the man of flesh and sense—"man born of woman," to take the Biblical phrase—while, in a way, distinct from nature, is yet so much involved with the natural order that there is difficulty in providing for him any immortal destiny. This earthly being, bound by strong ties to the material world, is by many supposed to be all the man there is; and where that supposition rules, quite naturally the idea of immortality has been generally abandoned. Unless Eucken is right in his affirmation that spiritual life is quite another kind of being, I should say the whole world must be finally driven to that same denial.

It is not possible to enter here upon any justification of Eucken's idea; but two or three of his phrases may be quoted to indicate what it is. "It is clear," he says, "that in spiritual life we have to do, not with a mere addition to a life already existent, but with an essentially new life. Psychical life, which otherwise is merely subservient to, or accompanies, the process of nature, gains, when human life is at its highest, an independence and content of its own. It is something so new and peculiar that it can be understood only as a new stage of reality, or the emergence of a depth of the world which was formerly hidden." This new life, he says, has a claim "to form a new domain of existence, as opposed to nature; to introduce new realities, and goods, and assert them in opposition to those which reign in the natural order." This would be absurd, he confesses, if the spiritual were man's possession alone. "Its cosmic ambition would be an audacious folly, were it not that it has a cosmic life behind it, by whose power it is driven forward." This spiritual life, then, emerging from the deeps of being into the heart of man, appears there a new order of creation;

as distinctly so as is man himself when compared with the animal kingdom beneath him. And being born into this world, like other preceding types of being, it can then only live by fighting its way to dominion.

The distinction between nature and man gives us a passive opposition which we are frequently required to face. The opposition of man against himself, owing to this division of his being, furnishes us with an active foe, who is capable of devilish cunning, of unending stubbornness, and unwearied industry. The tragic element, which a soft and relaxed age has been hoping to get rid of, thus comes back into life through Eucken's thought; as stern of feature as ever it stood in Greek drama, or in the theology of Calvin and Augustine. The world in which these stupendous antagonisms have their place is full of life and death contests; and for my part I believe Eucken does us good service in recalling us to that militant faith, which is the only faith that ever yet got much grip on the heart of the world. It is all very well to believe, if one can, that the red slayer is mistaken when he thinks he slays. For most of us, however, the appearance of slaughter is so wonderfully realistic that we shall prefer not to take unnecessary chances; and, at heart, we shall pretty surely despise a creed which treats life's struggle as if it were a kind of painted show.

If the man of today could be rid of his notion of some resistless power in the system of things which is sure to set right all his industrial and social and political wrongs,—a notion, I take it, which never had anything more than theoretical validity, and one that is contradicted by the whole weight of the world's experience,—this man of our time might better understand the debt he owes to those who, before him, have fought the good fight of faith. If he could be taught that the same battle which mankind has waged against venomous reptiles and savage beasts is to be continued in his own heart, we should have better assurance of the kind of man to make a "good soldier of Jesus Christ"; one who masters himself before he undertakes to master the world.

In all this Eucken's thought is new only in the sense that it presents a new balance and combination of elements that have long played their part in religious philosophy. Slight changes, however, in the arrangement of a set of ideas may produce as great

a difference in the result as is frequently effected by the slight variation of a chemical formula. We cannot shovel together, anyhow, the elements of chemistry to secure what we are after. They must be put together exactly right. The claim which I am inclined to make for Eucken is that he has combined the constituent parts of religious faith into a strong and effective union of ideas that is likely to have much influence over the thinking of the next generation of men.

One rather original contribution to the sum of these ideas he appears to have made. That is his account of the genesis of what, following the terminology of Paul, we may still call the spiritual man. Perhaps one reason why so many minds in our time have inclined to reject the spiritual man has been that they did not understand very well where he came from, and were unwilling to acknowledge him till he could furnish a better pedigree. Eucken indeed does not assume to tell us precisely where he comes from; but he sets forth the manner of his coming, in such reasonable terms, that perhaps the spiritual man may be now considered as sufficiently introduced even to high circles of academic thought. Another name for him, in Eucken's vocabulary, could be the Social man. For in a way, (though not in the political sense), Eucken is a tremendous socialist, and is never weary of pouring scorn and contempt on what he calls individualism.

There is one kind of man who lives altogether in and for himself. Other men are no more to him than so many trees, whose fruit he gathers. He may be learned or ignorant, coarse or refined, of high station or low; but always the predominant note of his character is selfishness. This is what Eucken calls "individualistic" living; and a school of thought which advocates or defends this manner of life he calls individualism. But there is another kind of man who lives mainly (and may live entirely) for others; the great object of whose thought and care is not what he can get out of existence, but the perfection of those relationships through which individuals come into possession of a common life. It is out of these social relationships, Eucken appears to think, that the higher life has its spring. Man by himself is an ignoble creature. Man among his fellows, thinking and acting for them as for himself, only then unlocks the hidden

resources of his own being and manifests a spirit that can be truly called divine.

This does not clear up the whole mystery of our spiritual life, and there is room for different theories, if we are to have a closer explanation. But it presents to us a very good natural origin of that division which we find within ourselves. It emphasizes what is far more important to us than mere speculative ideas, viz.: the great width of the chasm which really separates two orders of human life, and the utter impossibility that the two kinds of being can ever live at peace together. In the whole range of language we have no two words that come nearer to representing a polar difference than do "love" and "selfishness." No stable equilibrium of such opposite passions can ever be made. The entirely selfish man can be at peace with himself; so may the man who is altogether governed by love. But any mind into which both forces play will forever be torn by their contending might; and if one has ever fallen into those morbid states whose misery is that the mind cannot, for an instant, get away from itself, he is likely to feel that deliverance from this, even into that qualified and partial regard for things outside the self to which ordinary living has attained, is nothing short of a revolutionary change.

For myself, when I contrast the utterly selfish life with such an entirely unselfish example as we have in the mind of Christ, the difference appears to me as great as that between the lowest beginnings of organic life and its highest completed forms. Moreover, when I ask how it was that the supremely selfish being (which we may suppose the primitive man to have been) when he became conscious of his relationship to other beings like himself, found in his heart motives and desires prompting him to make the beginning of a kingdom of heaven, I seem to require some theory of divine incarnation for an answer. Until the tiger has been turned into a domestic animal, I shall never understand how, even by minute gradations, selfishness has been converted into love. It looks more like the gradual elimination of one set of motives and desires, and the substitution of others springing from a different source.

I long ago picked up a phrase in an English review which has

since grown, with me, to have no small significance. A writer of that day warned his readers against "the tendency of human nature to pulverize a fact and call it an explanation." Especially since "development" came in, the world is much disposed to think that all things are accounted for when the wide gaps between them are filled in by a multitude of short steps. Yet surely, if one has to walk it, a mile is still a mile, however it may be reduced to inches. The fact that humanity by slow degrees does rise from selfishness to love, really explains nothing of the mystery of the transformation; nor does it in any wise alter another fact of our experience, that between love and selfishness no truce can ever be made.

In this case the life of the higher nature demands the death of the lower as truly as the disruption or decay of the husk is required to set an imprisoned seed at liberty. In so far as we are ruled by selfishness, we have no place within the Kingdom of the Spirit, which is governed by a different law. If once we come to see, with Eucken, that human nature can no more endure, half-selfish and half-spiritual, than a nation could live half-slave and half-free, then we shall understand that the Master's counsels to stifle and cast out the lower self were not extreme, and that the exclamation of his apostle, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" was not the mere groan of a fanatic.

In Eucken's philosophy, then, we have mankind once more occupying that central place on the wide stage of the physical creation which ancient poetry and religion assigned to human beings; and we are thereby delivered from that feeling of the littleness and the worthlessness of our life which finds so much sad expression in modern literature. We have this child of Deity, inheritor of the freedom and the creative faculty belonging to the sons of God, set to do battle with oppositions that surround his steps; made to achieve greatness only by stout courage and tireless industry.

Above all, we have man forced to hard conflict with an inward foe; incapable of peace and rest save as he stands, at least for the moment, victorious over the tempter in his own heart.

All this may be held to reflect very closely the common consciousness of what life is, and therefore we have reason to say



that religion has by no means fallen out of date. Every prophet who only professes to show how God may be man's helper through these ways of difficulty and trial can be sure of some hearing and following, according to the boldness of his promises, though his offer be little more than an empty boast. And when one does really bring the might of the Spirit to their aid, mankind will be almost ready to worship him as if he were a god.